

STORES

Bal Harbour Shops CEO on the significance of pop-ups in luxury

Matthew Whitman Lazenby tells Retail Brew about his company's multi-city pop-up tour and why he believes the concept works.



Bal Harbour Shops

By Jeena Sharma

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Since Bal Harbour Shops, an open-air shopping mall, first opened in the affluent suburb of Miami Beach in 1965, it has attracted luxury retailers from Balmain to Tiffany & Co.

Now, it's bringing the shopping experience to other cities across the country in the form of pop-ups.

The Access Pop-Up will feature luxury retailers including Frette, Assouline, Bonpoint, Addict, and Santa Maria Novella in a multi-city tour starting in Raleigh, North Carolina, on November 22 and then moving on to Greenville, South Carolina, as well as Tequesta and South Walton County in Florida.

“Built from 30 custom-built shipping containers, the branded pop-up will include covered walkways with fans, a retractable canopy, and a fine dining restaurant called The Whitman that will seat 150 people, with a full bar and lounge,” the brand said in a statement. “The environment will showcase Bal Harbour Shops’s palm-tree motif and garden-like bright green monstera leaf signature design. Koi ponds, fountains, and planters filled with lush greenery, plus piped-in music will help bring the entire tropical, zen-like atmosphere of Bal Harbour Shops to life.”

The luxury event will also have daily activations, “including champagne-filled brunches, coveted holiday shopping experiences and much more,” per the brand via email. The goal is to turn shopping into an “emotional” experience that customers can enjoy with their friends and family, Bal Harbour Shops president and CEO Matthew Whitman Lazenby told Retail Brew.

To unpack all of it, we caught up with Whitman Lazenby to discuss why the company set out on this expedition, the importance of luxury pop-ups, and the future.

This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

So who is going to be part of this Access Pop-Up experience?

The concept of co-tenancy—whereby tenants want to make sure that they know who’s going to be around them is important to most every tenant—but it’s critically important to luxury tenants who are going to be so focused on brand and image. What we’ve assured them is that the opportunity will be closed to anyone who is not a Bal

Harbour Shops tenant. We have about 110 leases of Bal Harbour Shops, so it's where we're pulling from that audience for this particular opportunity.

But why the smaller cities? Why not New York or LA?

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We talk a lot in Florida about all the migration into the state, which is certainly true. Florida and Texas in particular have benefited, but it's just the old assumption that you need to be in one of the nation's major cities to sell this type of product. We don't believe it's true. There's no demonstrable ultra-high-net-worth pockets throughout the United States in markets like the four [we are covering] that really have no luxury offerings to speak of. These folks have to get in the car and drive for hours or even hop on a plane to go shopping. We thought we would bring that experience to them in a vibrant way that is both sort of high, high touch, which is what these luxury products demanded.

Do you think pop-ups are essential to help luxury brands reach new customers, and how is yours different?

Absolutely. What's great about any pop-up is that it enables a brand that may not be sure about a specific market or a specific location to give it a try. Usually, right in pop-ups, you're moving into a store that's fully built out and you're spending comparatively much less capital, trying to make this place work for you. And you'll operate out of it for sometimes a week or a month or three months. Here, it's the same idea. These stores, these brands that might not be willing to spend the millions of dollars on operating a store to market for 10 years to kind of give it a try, can come in and see for

themselves if it's a good fit for them. But unlike what they would typically do in a pop-up where it's just one brand, kind of in isolation, we have the opportunity here to bring on a shopping center scale, all of the peers that they would want to be with. There's nothing new about pop-ups and frankly, there's nothing new about luxury brands using shipping containers as a way to communicate their branding, but to our knowledge, what we're doing in terms of trying to do it on the scale of a shopping center has never been done before.



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